

ART. XV.—*The Nest, Egg, and Young of the Lyrebird—*
(Menura Superba). By LUDWIG BECKER.

UNTIL lately, the egg of the Lyrebird was unknown in Europe. During the Melbourne-Paris Exhibition in 1854, Messrs. Williams and Leadbeater exhibited a case containing stuffed Lyrebirds and an egg of the same. By permission of the owners of the egg, I made a drawing of it, and sent the sketch to the Professor of natural history, Dr. Kaup, in Germany, who presented it for publication to Dr. Cabanis, in Berlin. From this time the egg of the *Menura Superba* has, in some measure, become known at home. The fact of the well known French naturalist, Jules Verreaux, requesting that my original drawing of the egg might be forwarded to him, proved that the subject was not wholly devoid of interest. The aborigines who brought the egg to Melbourne, belong to the Yarra tribe; and one of them possessing a higher degree of civilization and intelligence than the rest, and who is looked upon by his tribe as a sort of leader, is the son of the Yarra tribe chieftain, who, with other chiefs of the country (which forms now part of the county of Bourke), brought the curious land sale with Batman to conclusion. The son's name is Simon, and I put myself in direct communication with him, in order to obtain as much information as he, from his own experience, could give concerning the native animals, etc. By presenting him and one of his relations with their respective photographic portraits, I succeeded at last in making them fulfil a long-given promise, and accordingly they brought a nest and egg of the *Menura Superba* to Melbourne. To-day I have the honor of laying before you all the new details gathered from the aborigines and other acute observers, as also my own remarks, together with the original nest and its contents.

Bullan-Bullan is the name which the aborigines of the Yarra tribe give the *Menura Superba*. The word has some similarity to the gurgling tone which the bird at times is heard to emit. The favourite place chosen by the Bullan-Bullan for building its nest, is the dense scrub on the slopes of deep gullies, or in thickly grown small plains, lying between the bends of rivers, but still in the vicinity of mountains. Here the bird selects young trees, standing close together, and whose stems form something like a funnel. Between the saplings, one or two feet from the ground, it makes fast its nest; sometimes it may be found also upon

the trunk of a tree, hollowed out by some bush fire; or it selects a fern-tree, of not too great a height, for the same purpose. The nest proper is ten inches in diameter, and is five inches high. It is closely woven together from fine but strong roots, and the inside is lined with the softer feathers of the bird. Round this nest the bird builds a rough covering, composed of sticks and pieces of wood, grass, moss, and leaves, in such a manner that it projects over the genuine nest, affording the sitting bird a shelter from above. An opening in the side of the nest serves as an entrance, through which the female enters backwards, with her tail laid over her back, and, with watchful eye and ear, keeps her head in the direction of the opening. The female lays only one egg a year, of the size of a duck egg. Its colour is of a light ash gray, with darker spots slightly tinted with brown. The colour resembles in fact so closely the colour of the feathers with which the nest is lined, that it is not easy to detect the egg; it would seem, indeed, as if nature wished to protect this species of the feathered tribe "*ab ovo.*"

It is generally believed that the *Menura Superba* make use of the same nest for several years. The nest and egg before you were found on the 31st of August inst., and arrived in Melbourne on the 4th of September, in a good state of preservation. This is somewhat astonishing, considering that the "black fellow" carried them on his back by day, wrapped up in his Opposum-skin, while by night he had to protect them from the wild cats and other animals. In Melbourne, unfortunately, or rather fortunately, the egg was broken, and an almost fully developed young one dropped out, which would, in the course of two or three days, have broken through the shell itself.

The young one is almost unfledged, having only here and there feathers, resembling black horse-hair, of an inch in length. The middle of the head and spine are the parts most thickly covered, while the forearm and the legs are less so. A tuft is visible on its throat, as also two rows of small and light coloured feathers on its belly. The skin is of a yellowish grey colour, darker at the feet; the claws are grey, and the beak is black. The eyelids are closed, but not grown together.

I believe that the period of incubation of the Lyrebird begins in the first week of August, and that the young one breaks through the shell in the beginning of September.